(Rs. in crores)

	No. of Projects	Amount Sanctioned
Rural Roads	119	70.54
Rural Bridges	126	51.32

(c) and (d) NABARD has reported that RIDF loans are released on reimbursement basis, as and when the claims are received from the State Government on expenditure incurred by it. As per phasing indicated at the time of sanction, the funds are to be released over a period of three years as indicated below :

(Rs. in crores)

Year	Amount
1996-97	10.50
1997-98	90.30
1998-99	21.06

NABARD has further reported that the State Government is yet to draw the amount during the current year.

Excise Duty Benefit to Consumers

4408. SHRI HARIN PATHAK : Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether any assessment has been made by the Government to ensure that the benefit of reduction in excise and customs duty is extended to the consumers by the manufacturers;

(b) if so, the details thereof during 1994-95 and 1995-96;

(c) whether lack of response on the part of manufacturers in passing such benefits to consumers have been noticed during the above period;

(d) if so, the details thereof and the action taken against such manufacturers; and

(e) the steps taken by the Government to protect the interest of consumers in this regard ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI M.P. VEERENDRA KUMAR): (a) to (e) The prices of commodities are generally determined by market forces and depend on a multiplicity of factors, of which duty of excise or customs is only one. The Government have not made any detailed study of the extent to which the reduction in excise and customs duties offered in the budgets has been passed on to the consumers.

There is no legal mechanism to ensure reduction in price to the extent of reduction in duty of excise or customs, where there is no price control. However, to protect the interest of consumers, Ministry of Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution has taken the following actions :-

(i) the industry associations were persuaded to pass on the benefits of duty concessions voluntarily to the consumers.

(ii) letters were addressed to the Chief Ministers of the State/UTs to ensure that the benefits of duty concessions were passed on to the consumers.

Biological Wealth

4409. DR. PRABIN CHANDRA SARMA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state :

(a) whether the attention of the Government has been drawn to the news item captioned "Large-scale biopiracy going on in NE" appearing in the 'Assam Tribune', dated February 25, 1997;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether the orchids alongwith other biological wealth of the North-East out of which European Floriculture companies are earning huge income in comparison to the Indian companies;

(d) if so, the details thereof alongwith the reasons therefor; and

(e) the steps taken/being taken to curb biopiracy ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI BOLLA BULLI RAMAIAH) : (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. In the news item it was stated that the wealth of India's forests and fields, its rich biodiversity, is being plundered by foreign companies and their agents.

(c) and (d) Government has no evidence of this. However, exports of all items of plants included in Appendix I and Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Spices (CITES), wild orchid, and certain other plants, plant portions and their deriviatives are prohibited.

(e) A national legislation on biodiversity is under preparation which includes regulating access to and transfer of genetic material of the country.

WTO Meeting in Geneva

4410. DR. ASIM BALA : Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state the details of the issues